

IS AN ARAB-ISRAELI WAR INEVITABLE?

A Challenge to American Leadership

HAL LEHRMAN

JERUSALEM

IT IS only too plain that further Western reluctance to deal sternly with the Arabs will have dismal consequences for all concerned in the Middle Eastern crisis—including the Arabs. The only party guaranteed to profit from present Anglo-American timidity is the Soviet Union.

It cannot be proved beyond a doubt that a strong policy in the past would have averted today's dangerous position. But it can be demonstrated with near-mathematical precision that a weak policy in the future will produce extremely unpleasant results.

Dangerously soon, it may impel Israel to fight a war for survival.

It will facilitate deeper and deeper Soviet penetration of the Middle East.

And if the West goes on trying to purchase Arab loyalty instead of energetically confronting Arab arrogance, the final result can be catastrophe: the complete infiltration and capture of the Arab world by the Kremlin's agents, foreign and domestic.

THIS correspondent is approaching the close of a seven months' tour that has in-

cluded two months in the Arab countries and six weeks in Israel. Certain fundamental facts emerged:

1. The Arabs hate Israel with an intensity that surpasses measurement and description. The quantity of time, energy, and passion devoted in the Arab countries to railing against, brooding over, and just hating Israel has to be seen on the spot to be believed.

2. The Arabs have no intention of making peace with Israel, not voluntarily. The only settlement or "peace" they can freely contemplate is on terms so disadvantageous to Israel as would lead to her paralysis, surrender, and extinction. They believe that, sooner or later, they will be able to obtain such terms.

3. The Arabs calculate that Israel's elimination can be hastened by exploitation of the Soviet presence and threat in the Middle East. They count on obtaining successive advantages over Israel—and a swelling bonanza of other favors from the West—by working on Anglo-American dread of a further Arab turn toward Moscow.

The Western powers can choose between two lines of action in coping with this diplomatic blackmail. They can surrender to it and appease the Arab demands. In that case, as surely as night follows day, their position in the Middle East will steadily diminish, and in the end be lost altogether. For Arab confidence and appetite will grow stronger with every bite. With every bite, the Soviet Union will loom larger as the alternate good provider if the other providers should fail. Indeed, the Soviets' one small investment in Czechoslovak arms to Egypt is already paying fat dividends: their stock has never stood higher with the Arabs, and Moscow gets the credit now for every friendly gesture the West makes. Isn't it obvious, reason the

HERE is a second article in which HAL LEHRMAN reports the findings of his latest tour of the Middle East, and it will be followed by others. The first, "Three Weeks in Cairo," appeared in our February number. (Elsewhere in this issue, in "Britain's Traditional Hold Fails," George Lichtheim reports on the diplomatic aspects of the Arab-Israeli crisis.) Mr. Lehrman hardly needs introduction to our readers. Born in New York, he studied at Cornell and the Sorbonne. After working for the Associated Press, Havas, *Newsweek*, and other publications, he served as wartime director of the OWI in Turkey. Since then he has free-lanced and written two books: *Russia's Europe* (1947) and *Israel: The Beginning and Tomorrow* (1952). He is also well known as a lecturer.

Arabs, that the gesture was made because of fear of the Russians?

Soviet hegemony in the Middle East, if things are allowed to deteriorate that far, would be a major disaster for the free world. For Israel it would mean annihilation. Right now, and for a given period of time to come, Israel can defeat any combination of Arab states even without arms to match the jet planes and tanks already delivered by the Soviet bloc. But Israel could not defeat an Arab military combination organized and directed by Russian Communists. Nor could she endure—in any form worth enduring—if the countries on her borders were Sovietized or satellized. Therefore Israel cannot simply stand by and wait for Western policy to wake up. Israel, tiny though she is, must fashion a policy of her own. At a certain moment, if all else failed, that policy would have to contemplate recourse to war.

The West's other possible line of action is to call the Arabs to order, at long last showing the toughness which the best Western "thinking" until now has deprecated as sure to drive the Arabs into the arms of the Russians. The glaringly evident fact is that a yielding attitude has sent the Arabs toward Moscow anyway.

If it is a policy of toughness the West elects to follow, then there is a formidable means of pressure at hand. The fact is that the Arabs are, quite literally, terrified of the Israeli military establishment, its officers, and its men. At the same time, not surprisingly, they take a dim view of their own military prowess. Judicious exploitation of this fear and self-distrust could soften and dissolve the whole Arab-Israeli deadlock—and even the threat of continued Soviet advance.

How can the Arabs be so frightened of Israel and at the same time act so belligerently? Because they do not have to answer to their opponent for their belligerency. Between them and him rises a forest of protective international obstructions, moral and legal. Best of all, they occupy a superb bargaining position vis-à-vis the Western makers of these obstructions.

Egyptian Premier Gamal Abdel Nasser's success in getting arms from Czechoslovakia, after being rebuffed by the West, gave Arabs everywhere a vast sense of euphoria and uplift. This was only magnified when the West failed to make any effective counter-move. For the Arabs, the implications were limitless: we, the long exploited and newly free, have made the foreigner tremble; the mighty Russians and the mighty Anglo-Americans fear each other and need us; therefore we too are mighty now and we shall do as the mighty do—we shall always take, and never give.

So, if the Arabs avoided settling with Israel before, why should they do so now? If the West fears that its least nod toward Israel may provoke another Arab-Soviet embrace, then it pays for Cairo and Damascus to be more obdurate than ever. The Arabs' strategic view of Israel rests on two assumptions: first, that Arab boycott and blockade are already bringing her close to economic collapse; and second, that the Jewish state is an expansionist power that can at any instant mount a full-scale invasion in all directions. It does not matter that these assumptions negate one another. The Arabs are applying both. If they can bully the United States into cutting down on aid to Israel (and perhaps even eliminating tax exemptions for philanthropy to her), they will speed her economic collapse. If they can scare the United States out of restoring the arms balance by sale of weapons to Israel, they can frustrate "Zionist imperialism."

This is a delightfully convenient arrangement for the Arabs—to grow militarily stronger, retaining the initiative all the time, while Israel's military potential is frozen and her economic structure crumbles. And this line can be pursued with virtually no risk, since the West has boxed itself in by all sorts of pledges to protect the Arabs if Israel should try to break out of her trap. Nasser's dearest hope is that Israel will simply do nothing. The main Egyptian propaganda line therefore is that Cairo's huge arms preparations are exclusively for defense, and

that Israel has nothing to fear. Arab commentators are constantly recalling that, prior to the Czech deal, foreign observers were unanimously agreed that Israel was strong enough to trounce all the Arab armies singly or collectively; nor had any Israeli spokesman ever denied this. How is it, they now inquire, that Israel has suddenly become so dreadfully weak? What about the 1950 Anglo-Franco-American guarantee of Middle Eastern frontiers? This protects Israel as much as it protects us, they say. What more does Israel want?

For the most part, however, the Arab argument is more truculent. Editorials and speeches harp on Arab invincibility. Israelis are always presented as hook-nosed, claw-fingered types in *Stuermer* style. I remember a cartoon of Premier David Ben Gurion in "his military uniform"—a wandering Jew garbed as a beggar with staff in one hand, the other outstretched to John Bull and Uncle Sam. Describing political life in Israel, one Arab paper solemnly asserted that Israeli parties had their origins in syndicates of gangsters. Elsewhere, a pro-Israel conference in the United States was described as a meeting of "Zionist drunkards," a courtesy message to it from the White House denounced as "a hostile diplomatic action against the Arabs." If the United States insists on incurring Arab enmity, cries the Cairo *Al Akhbar*, "the Middle East will become a sea of blood." Should "American bullets" be supplied to the Zionists, warns *Al Ahram*, "Egyptian-American relations will cease and Egypt will knock the stuffings out of Israel. Let America bear this in mind. . . ."

IN DAMASCUS I saw the funeral of three Syrian officers who had fallen at Lake Tiberias. The cortège was a quarter of a mile long. Most of the mourners were high school students. Normally these lads are among the most troublesome and dangerous elements in the country. A riot by them can threaten a government's existence. (The more immature and unstable an Arab country is politically, it seems, the younger are those who dominate its streets.) The funeral

might have been the spark for an insurrection; instead, it was serene and complacent—almost a victory parade. The Syrian army had just announced a thrilling "counter-attack" in which a hundred Israelis had been "killed." So the high school patriots felt no impulse to storm parliament and demand vengeance—which would have deeply embarrassed the modest Syrian high command. In private conversation, Syrian officials and newspapermen freely admitted to me that the counter-attack was pure invention.

Nasser had awarded himself a similar "victory" at Nitzana about a month earlier. The *Egyptian Gazette*, hailing a glorious counter-attack which had reportedly destroyed some two hundred Israelis, wrote: "The fight showed the Israeli regular army that aggression does not pay; by now its leaders must be convinced that frontier attacks will be repulsed with the same vigor by soldiers who know what they are fighting for." The comic truth was that the Israelis had finished cleaning up an Egyptian-invaded enclave on Israeli territory by 1 A.M.; around 5 A.M. the Israelis abandoned a hill on the Egyptian side which they had temporarily seized; some three hours later, without laying down any fire, because they knew the position was unoccupied, the Egyptians lumbered back with tanks in full battle array and "recaptured" the vacant hill—to the amusement of Israeli troops watching from a hill just beyond the frontier.

As for the Syrian army, I have met only two groups who were impressed by it. The first is the Syrian parliamentary regime, which must always reckon with the possibility of another military coup on the Shishekli model. The second is the government of little Lebanon next door, which has been adroitly evading the signing of an alliance with Syria for the excellent reason that Syrian troops hurrying to liberate Lebanese territory would endanger Lebanese independence far more than Israeli security. A military agreement that links Syria with Egypt and Saudi Arabia under an Egyptian commander-in-chief remains a paper pact much like the alliances George Lichtheim

wrote of in last December's COMMENTARY "between non-existent armies to fight imaginary enemies."

In every Arab country I visited (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan), informal conversations with junior as well as field officers invariably disclosed a firm respect for Israeli muscle, machines, fighting spirit, and fighting men. When asked about the quality of his own outfit, the Arab officer across the table would shrug his shoulders or make a face. If there is any army for which the average Arab professional soldier has greater contempt than his own, it is another Arab army. Exchanges of compliments between Egypt and Iraq in this connection make illuminating reading. During the Nitzana unpleasantness, Iraqi Premier Nuri Sa'id told his local press he had offered to rush an armored brigade to help the Egyptians—but he neglected to communicate the offer to Cairo, a fact of which the Egyptian press is still reminding him. In exchange, the Iraqis have been loudly inquiring why the Egyptians failed to succor their Syrian ally after the Tiberias misfortune. The whole Arab world expected Egyptian jets or paratroopers to turn up in Syria, the Iraqi press noted, or at least an Egyptian attack on the southern Israeli front. But Egypt simply sent a cash donation equal to less than the price of two planes. "This is no time for contributions but for battles," roared one commentator far away in Baghdad.

Arabs have the best of reasons to respect the Israeli soldier. They have been soundly drubbed in every encounter with him. Without exception, every foreign military observer I met in the area shared this view. One of them, a member of the Syrian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, briefed me in Damascus the night after the Tiberias raid. Politically, there is no doubt that this raid in retaliation for Syrian attacks on Jewish fishers was a blunder. It came just when Israel should have been on her best behavior, with her foreign minister at that very moment pleading in Washington for defensive arms against Egypt. But as a military operation pure and simple it evoked the admiration of

the MAC officer, who fairly glowed with professional enthusiasm over the intricacy, synchronization, daring, and masterful execution of the Israeli battle plan. "Could the Syrians put on a comparable performance?" I asked. He gave me a pitying look.

In Baghdad, one military attaché thought the Iraqi soldiers were "bloody useless," but that some Iraqi officers showed promise. Another attaché thought some Iraqi soldiers had possibilities but the officers were "bloody awful." I reached Jordan in time for the pre-Christmas insurrection, to discover that the much advertised Arab Legion had almost defeated itself just trying to push back street rioters. If its British commanders ever departed, non-British Western sources in Amman predicted, the Legion would soon "go Oriental" all the way. In Cairo, the army looked a shade snappier than when I had last seen it ten years earlier, but, though the country is now ruled by a lean military junta instead of a fat king, the Egyptian officer remains a beribboned salon warrior. A social gulf separates him from the man in the ranks, who continues to remain without the smallest clue as to why he wears the Egyptian uniform.

EXCEPT, perhaps, to kill Israelis. Observers who know both sides feel that a large part of Israel's superiority in combat is due to morale, and a large part of that is due to point of view. The Egyptian soldier is taught only to hate "Zionists"; the Israeli soldier is taught to know and love his country. In battle a man is far less likely to risk his life to kill something he hates than to defend something he loves. Between Egyptian officer and man there exists a wall of mutual ignorance and mistrust; the Israeli officer and man are neighbors in a nearly classless society. Under the Israeli army's system of recruit education, even the "Oriental" immigrant emerges after thirty months a spirited and dedicated Israeli.

Arab commanders fight by the textbook, their men by mechanical obedience to orders. But because Israel's size and location condemn her to being outnumbered and sur-

rounded, the Israeli commander is trained to square these disadvantages by doing the bold and unexpected, and the soldier by thinking for and relying on himself when separated from command. The Israelis have made a specialty, for instance, of night fighting, where self-reliance is at a maximum. The Arabs, quite literally, are afraid of the dark.

They are also, for the above reasons and others, afraid of the Israelis. All the armies in the Middle East have progressed since 1948. But by universal consensus of expert neutral opinion, the army of Israel—in organization, training, technique, and sheer fight—has progressed beyond compare.

Since the more professional Arab soldiers are gloomily aware of this discrepancy, it would take an inordinate amount of provocation or encouragement to prod them into heroic decisions. Having observed Arab malaise at close range, I do not share the common Israeli opinion that, from the moment they learn the know-how of their new Czech-delivered weapons, Egyptian policymakers will be spiritually ready for a military adventure. The Israeli makes the mistake of putting himself in the Egyptian's skin when he asks what he would do if, after living a long time in mortal dread of someone, he suddenly acquired bombers which the other team's fighters could not pursue, tanks which enemy guns could not dent, and perhaps even submarines against which the enemy had no defenses at all. An Arab regime—especially a military dictatorship like Nasser's—must reckon with the cost of losing, not just a war, but even a single battle.

With Stalin tanks and MiG-15's safely landed at Alexandria, an Egyptian major confessed to me that he now felt more confident of keeping the Israeli army—from Cairo! "We don't have to worry much any more about being conquered," he said. "What scares us is the possibility of being disgraced." He meant that any Egyptian setback in early clashes with the Israelis might topple the junta before Egypt's massive superiority in arms could be brought into play.

NEVERTHELESS, the Israeli contention that such material superiority remains an intolerable threat has substance. A grim guessing game is now going on in Israel: by what date will Egyptian personnel achieve proficiency with their new equipment, and how soon afterward will the pressures of that readiness induce Nasser to strike?

Not many allow themselves to think of the possibility that Soviet satellite pilots—or even Soviet Moslems—may be assigned to the Egyptian air force. According to available intelligence, the technicians accompanying the Czech deliveries are only instructors and foremen, not fighting men or mechanics—so far. Suppose, then, that Nasser has to rely exclusively on Egyptians. Suppose, too, that Egyptians take longer than Israelis to learn the use, servicing, and maintenance of complicated supersonic and electronic mechanisms; that a ground crew of seventeen to thirty men must be trained for each super-jet pilot in the air; and that only the rare Egyptian flier will be able to match the average skill attainable by Israeli personnel. Even so, the Israelis must reckon that it normally takes only twenty to thirty flying hours for the pilot of a Meteor (Egypt's standard jet-fighter) to be converted into a MiG-type pilot. (Ostentatiously, Cairo has let press reports get out that Egyptians are already flying the new ships—but no correspondent, apparently, has yet stood by at an airfield and seen Egyptians coming off these planes.) Even 50 per cent efficiency can lift an Ilyushin-28 light bomber off the ground and bring it more or less over the target. The computations of Israeli experts hover somewhere around late spring or early summer as the period when the Czech war matériel will have been sufficiently digested in Egypt to permit its large-scale employment.

What then? The Egyptians reportedly have at least forty IL-28 bombers, which could reach Tel Aviv eight minutes after take-off from their border airfields. Each carries a short-haul bomb load of four tons, which could be dropped from 40,000 feet. This is higher than Israeli anti-aircraft guns

can shoot. No existing Israeli jet-fighters could compete against a swarm of MiG's. Egypt has an estimated thirty big Stalin and fifty T-34 tanks (plus thirty-two British Centurions). Massed by night inside the Gaza strip, they could blitz across narrow Israel and cut the country in two within an hour. There is nothing of comparable defensive strength on the Israeli side to stop them.

How many military parades of this imposing armor, the Israelis ask, how many air shows by 24-plane wings of MiG-15's (and possibly a wing of MiG-17's, against which the fastest Israeli jet is just a sitting duck) would be required before the Cairo populace would feel war fever? How long before the rasher officers in Nasser's entourage began to dream of easy glory? How long before even Nasser, more cautious than his colleagues but dependent on their support, began to feel the pressure? Besides, what simpler, more spectacular way to make good his claim to primacy in the Arab world than by knocking Israel out with one gigantic blow?

At a certain fateful point in time, Israel believes, the Egyptians' certainty of victory will erase their fear of counter-attack and defeat. At that moment the temptations of their crushing superiority—so crushing as to *guarantee* success without even minimum risk—will sweep the last lingering hesitations aside. After all, it is the Arabs who insist there is no peace. Israel has never said she intended to destroy the Arab world; it is the Arabs who have many times proclaimed their intention to destroy her. Many Israelis feel it would be an act of criminal negligence to wait supinely until the point of no return was reached.

TO STAVE off arriving at that fatal point, the Israelis contend, only one effective way exists: the Egyptians must be kept from becoming *sure* they can win a war. How? Not by any of the proposals currently in vogue. It is almost frivolous, they say, to expect to restrain a dangerously armed Egypt by something like the recent Anglo-American suggestion of a demilitarized border strip

two kilometers wide. Nor do the Israelis put much stock in a reinforced guarantee of frontiers by the Western Big Three or even in a special American security treaty with Israel. The Egyptians may not necessarily be deterred by the threat of armed Western intervention; the powers may find it convenient not to intervene (they didn't when the Arabs attacked in 1948); intervention after a blitz assault may be eminently sincere and yet quite useless (Britain and France fulfilled their commitments to Poland in 1939, but Poland was already destroyed). In the Israeli view, the one "guarantee" the Egyptians will respect is Israel's possession of adequate arms. If Israel's ability to hit back is preserved, the Egyptians will have to take the risk of retaliation and defeat into account—and the risk will dissuade them.

What amount of Western arms is required to compensate for the deliveries of Czech arms to Egypt? Not an equal amount. Israel does not want an F-86 plane for every MiG-15, or a Patton tank for every Stalin. On the basis of the evidence, she is confident that her men will handle intricate matériel better than the Egyptians, and will be able to do more with less. Besides, she can't afford quantitative equality. One American F-86 costs nearly a half million dollars. Israel asks only for the right to buy *qualitative* equality. This means smaller amounts of weapons. But they must be of the *same types*.

Israel wants just enough modern bombers, fighters, and tanks to make the Egyptians understand they cannot be immune to counter-attack. If they understand this, they will not dare to strike. After that, and only after that, would a treaty between Israel and the United States be welcomed as added insurance.

It is estimated that, from Czechoslovakia alone, Egypt has obtained a quantity of weapons costing her \$80 million but worth at least \$200 million at current prices. Israel wants to buy equivalent Western-made types to a value of \$50 million.

She can and is procuring some useful matériel and secondary equipment in the

open market. But the United States, Britain, and France—through direct manufacture or supervision of patents in other countries—control the distribution of the more important heavier equipment. The United States is Israel's major potential supplier. It was to the United States that Israel, as long ago as November, presented a list of desired items for purchase; it is from the United States that Israel, at this writing, continues to hope for sale of the weapons on which her survival depends.

IF THE required minimum of arms is not made available within a reasonable amount of time, a desperate act by Israel will become distinctly possible. There is already considerable anxiety in Western capitals. American warships are ostentatiously visiting Middle Eastern ports; one hears talk about the readiness and availability of British paratroops in Cyprus, and so on. All this is by way of unobtrusive reminder—impartially to both Arabs and Israelis, of course—that the way of the transgressor is likely to be thorny. It is plain that Washington and London do not want war in the Middle East. But it is also plain that delivery of weapons to Israel, rather than the pointing of weapons at her, would be more effective statesmanship for peace.

As a matter of fact, Israel seemed closer to the brink of "preventive war" immediately after announcement of the Czech arms deal with Egypt than she seems today, though five months have gone by without the slightest alleviation of her fears. The intensity of the shock received from the Czech deal was dramatically revealed by no less peaceable and sober a citizen than Peretz Bernstein, General Zionist leader in Israel and lately Minister of Trade and Industry. Openly and flatly, Bernstein called for war right then and there.

Previously, moderates like Bernstein had relied on the existing balance of military power to keep Israel secure. In their opinion, Ben Gurion's doctrine of retaliatory raids against Arab infiltration only caused Israel to be branded as an aggressor in the eyes of

a world whose support she manifestly needed. Menahem Beigin's advocacy of an imperial march to the Jordan and beyond they rejected as entirely irresponsible. But now they saw a situation rushing at them in which, once the Egyptians had learned to use their new weapons, especially the bombers, Israel could not hope to defeat the enemy, or even hold him off long enough to benefit from world sympathy and assistance. Consequently the Bernsteins of Israel found themselves compelled to advocate the rigorous logic of war in self-defense before the hour grew too late for anything save dying.

But the government of Israel chose another way, and the people went along. They felt war was too monstrous a solution—not because of the possibility of an Arab victory, which occurred to hardly anyone, but for practical and ethical reasons. Even a victorious war could be disastrous if it cost the bravest and best of the country's youth and wasted the national economy. It would make remoter than ever any prospect of true reconciliation with the Arabs. It would invite international sanctions and even, however unlikely, the intervention of international force, against which there could be no effective resistance. Worst of all, no matter what the justification of the decision to attack, it would stigmatize Israel as an aggressor. The temper of world opinion, including that of world Jewry, it was felt, had evolved too far in an atomic age for any state, whatever the merit of its case, to escape condemnation if it chose violence.

INSTEAD, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett went to Paris, Geneva, and Washington, pleading for arms. Israel entered a period of prayerful waiting. The anti-war tendency, once crystallized, was only accentuated by the retaliatory raid at Lake Tiberias in December. This operation, undertaken by the army with the consent of apparently only one member of the government—Prime Minister-Defense Minister Ben Gurion himself—startled the Israeli public and even the cabinet almost as much as it did the Syrian

command and the UN. Uneasiness swept the country; perhaps the military were getting out of hand or the Prime Minister was losing all sense of prudence, and Israel might consequently find herself engaged in a terrible adventure without even wanting it.

Ben Gurion—sharply criticized inside the cabinet and rebuked to his face by his intimate party comrades of Mapai with a vehemence to which he had never before been required to submit—emerged chastened. Though remaining the chief symbol of Israel's martial readiness, he now lent his full prestige to a policy of vigilant patience. "The maintenance of peace," he announced, "is preferable even to victory in war." Nevertheless, no one in Israel thinks that the present anti-war policy is immutable and eternal. A four-day Knesset debate on foreign affairs revealed widespread conviction that Israel would be attacked, and that preparation for war had therefore to be pressed by all possible means. Sharett made it clear that, since neither government nor parliament could foresee the future, the only course to follow was to meet the needs of the present hour—to strengthen Israel's capacity to fight, by arms and by civilian preparedness, as well as to retain the sympathy of world Jewry and the world. But there can be no assurance that a worsening situation—the continued widening of the gap in arms—will not compel revision of this policy, even to the extent of sacrificing sympathy from abroad for the sake of survival at home.

Israel is going doggedly ahead with a costly and economically non-productive program of home-front defense: stockpiling food and essential materials in case of a general blockade, procuring mobile generators and other kinds of emergency equipment in case of air raids, constructing bomb shelters, and planning for the mobilization of all economic and manpower resources, down to the detailed substitution of women for men in civilian jobs, and of older women for younger women. The tension and strained nerves all this involves will not be re-

laxed by continued harassment from the Arab side (the latest manifestation of which is the Egyptian threat to fire on "unauthorized" planes flying over the entrance to the Red Sea; this has forced El Al to suspend its service to South Africa).

Meanwhile, Israeli military intelligence will watch the progress of the Egyptian army's education in its new weapons. Anxiety must inevitably increase as long as there are no compensating acquisitions of defensive strength by Israel. Ben Gurion said not long ago: "Our aim is peace—but not suicide." Each day that no arms come makes the dilemma more desperate.

THERE are feeble and there are sober reasons for not giving arms to Israel. I heard a feeble one firmly advanced while I sat in the American embassy in Amman one day last December, just as the riots outside against the Baghdad Pact were dying down. "There's a report this morning that Washington is going to okay the sale of a lot of tanks to Israel," said a distinguished member of the staff. "If that's confirmed, this place will be pulled down over our ears by the mob." The inference was that the government of the United States ought to draft no policies disagreeable to street rioters anywhere in the world. One is entitled to wonder if such a rule for diplomacy should also influence American policy in, let us say, Argentina or France—yet in the Middle East more than a few Western representatives tend to take the whims and passions of the ever threatening mob into serious account when considering how best to advance the interests of their countries.

A more impressive argument against arms for Israel rests on the fear lest the Arab world retaliate by turning further toward the Soviets. The Arabs know that this specter haunts the Western diplomatic mind, and they exploit it for all it is worth. Except in Iraq, which is receiving all the arms she can absorb from Britain and the United States, in every Arab country I visited I received complacent assurances from Arab spokesmen that they would not hesitate to make a deal

with Moscow if "a single bullet goes to the Zionists." The Syrians, with an eye on Soviet bargain prices, have announced they will buy arms where they can get the most for the least—"just like bananas." During a single week of my Cairo stay, Colonel Nasser breathed that warning at least three times publicly.

DOES it never occur to Nasser or the other Arab leaders that their collaboration with Moscow must inevitably strengthen the Soviets, and that if the latter should move into the Middle East the Nassers would be the first on the liquidation list?

The Egyptian leader's main stated objection to early American offers of arms grants was that they involved entry of a military mission to supervise instruction and use. He professed to be suspicious of such "imperialist" agencies. Well, now the Soviets are decidedly on the premises with a military mission—and it is notorious that such Communist visitors neither devote themselves exclusively to their contract functions nor are easily persuaded to leave once their contracts have expired. Doesn't this give pause?

It does not—because Nasser habitually underestimates the intentions of the East just as he habitually exaggerates those of the West. He has insisted that the arms traffic with Moscow is a purely commercial transaction, especially welcomed by Egypt because of her single-crop cotton economy, which the Soviet bloc is so generously absorbing. In the beginning, he even assured unnerved diplomats that no satellite "technicians" need come in with the Czech arms purchases. He thought Egyptian teams going to Eastern Europe could bring home all the know-how required. Later, he admitted ruefully that this would not be enough. But he remains confident that his guest "instructors" will tend strictly to business. And he actually sees the entire deal as a *blow* to Communism in Egypt.

Nasser's reasoning goes somewhat like this: "The only Communist threat is an internal one. Communism can prosper here only with a weak government and mass un-

rest. The deal with the Czechs strengthened my government and calmed the people. Now the people know that this regime is purely Egyptian, unlike previous ones, and doesn't work for any foreign power. Internal tranquillity is our best guarantee against Communism." Interior Minister Zakaria Mokhialdin pointed out to me: "We lock up *our* Communists. Do you, in America or England? And how about France? Or Italy?"

Moscow's attraction for Cairo is enhanced by the Egyptians' belief that Russia will stand by them against Israel. In the event of war, they figure, both sides may be blockaded; the Israelis will always be clever enough to get aid somewhere and somehow, but Russia will be Egypt's only hope. But the Egyptians also like to flirt with Moscow because they know it enrages the West. It is another way of celebrating their delicious new "freedom." Thus the Soviets today are the lions of Egyptian society; their propaganda displays are lavish and applauded; every sign of Soviet "amity"—such as the two-hour visit of the USSR's ambassador to the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo, followed by official comment that "Russia now supports the Arabs and sympathizes with their causes"—is solemnly taken at full face value.

Egyptians pooh-pooh Western fears that every new handshake brings the Soviets deeper into the Middle East. Egyptians might understand the danger if it arrived in the shape of a Soviet expeditionary force; they simply do not see it in the form of popular Soviet diplomats, higher Soviet prestige, increased trade with the Soviet bloc, or the encouragement all this gives to fellow-traveling and to infiltration by crypto-Communists.

The disease, only beginning in Egypt, is close to epidemic in Syria, Egypt's ally, where key army officers—in a country with a tradition of colonel-dictators—follow Moscow's party line, and a solid minority bloc in parliament votes what Moscow desires. Soviet and satellite diplomatic missions have mushroomed all over Damascus. Red exhibitors from as far away as China (each with

a small battalion of "observers" who have a way of lingering after the show is packed up) are the favored participants in Syria's annual international fair. The Syrians consider all this Moscow-oriented activity as good clean fun, without ulterior design, a salutary counterpoise to nefarious Western domination—all in the name of national independence.

THE general Middle Eastern scene being so bleak, it is agreeable to report at least one encouraging thing—not very perceptible as yet, but nevertheless hopeful. The Czech-Egyptian arms agreement provoked as much revulsion among Westerners in the area as exhilaration among Arabs. In one country after another I found diplomats who, for the first time in my experience, were betraying signs of being fed up with the Arabs—disillusionment with their ways of negotiating and performing.

Not too much should be made of this. The typical diplomat is getting tired, yes, but only of his own Arabs, the ones in *his* bailiwick. The chap in Cairo, for instance, will say: "You never know what these blankety-blank Egyptians are going to do next. . . . But I hear that Nuri Sa'id up there in Iraq is a pretty sound character. . . ." Or in Baghdad, one hears: "It needs a miracle to get anything done in this country. . . . But they say the Lebanese are altogether different—real live wires. . . ." Nevertheless, it is encouraging that some real light is finally beginning to shine on the hitherto uncritically accepted Western portrait of the Noble Arab.

On a larger scale, though the West continues almost by conditioned reflex to seek commitments from the Arab world, it is noteworthy that more and more foreigners are beginning to agree on their futility. "How can you make a policy that's built on sand?" I was not infrequently and quite rhetorically asked in the last two months. "How can you be sure the Arab will still say tomorrow what he tells you today?"

There seems also to be some appreciation of the nature of Israel's security crisis—

though how much appreciation is conjectural after the State Department's grotesque decision in mid-February to release \$110,000 worth of spare parts to Israel as against 18 light tanks to Saudi Arabia. But even if Washington should do the unexpected and overcome its fears of Arab retaliation via Moscow sufficiently to give Israel some relief, the problem of what to do about the Arabs will still confront the West.

The fact is that a mere unfreezing of weapons for Israel will not solve the security problem, either for Israel or for the West. An approach must be devised to prevent such a decision's becoming a pretext for further Arab flirtation with the Soviets.

From the Western point of view, Arab embarkation upon an arms race will only increase the influence of the Soviets in the Middle East and Arab dependence upon Moscow. From Israel's point of view, such an arms race would keep her security in constant jeopardy. Moreover, it would constitute by itself a form of Arab economic warfare against Israel, if only because the Arabs would presumably continue to be able to buy arms cheap, while Israel would have to pay full price.

CLEARLY, something better is needed than just a license to Israel for arms purchases. What courses of action are available to the Western powers—especially to the United States—to satisfy Israel's defense needs and yet keep Egypt from going over wholly into the Soviet camp? Let it be noted straightway that this question may be academic: a basic ingredient of any effective American approach must be firmness—and there is no present reason to expect it. In the first shock of the Czech arms announcement, the United States was outraged enough to contemplate getting tough with the "double-crossing" Egyptians, as the impact wore off, fright crowded anger out and Washington now seems again to be dusting off the discredited methods of pious entreaty and bribe. Nevertheless, these unhappy tendencies do not absolve us from trying at least to determine whether other methods exist

for bringing pressure to bear on the Arabs.

In the Middle East I found a minority of thoughtful Americans who had accomplished the feat of being able to contemplate the Arabs coldly, with vision unclouded by romantic illusions about Arab prowess and dignity. From discussions with such hard-headed observers emerged the following plan of action:

Israel is asking to buy a quantity of arms from the United States which represents only a fraction of the Egyptian purchases from the Czechs. Israel wants this equipment as a deterrent alone, and is willing to give hard guarantees that she will not use it aggressively. Let the United States decide to give Israel these arms and obtain from her these commitments. Then let the United States, supported by Britain and France if possible, but alone if necessary, turn to Egypt, proclaim these decisions, and say:

"Arms to Israel—in the small quantities we are providing and with the absolute guarantees she is giving—do not threaten your security. For your self-defense, you will continue to hold an adequate advantage in strength. We therefore ask you to put the fear of an Israeli attack aside. We will help you and Israel to reach an agreement. Meanwhile we, the British, and the World Bank will proceed, as we have already indicated, to help you with economic development—especially the High Aswan Dam—which you rightly insist is so vital to your future.

"But you must not attempt to preserve your previous massive and provocative arms superiority over Israel by turning to Russia for more arms. If you do that, it will prove your aggressive intentions toward Israel and your hostility towards us. In that case, we will hit you with everything we have. We will ruin you in the world cotton market by dumping our surpluses. We will leave you high and dry on the Aswan project. We will press the British to get tough about your bad faith (insofar as you have admitted Communist technicians) in implementing the agreement which awarded you the Suez Canal base on condition you kept it available

for repossession by Britain in the event of Soviet assault. We will bring to bear all our influence to vote sanctions against you in the UN. Among other things, we will clap an oil embargo on you that will close down your bakeries, start food riots, and end your regime. And we will begin building Israel up militarily so that you will *really* have to worry about her. . . ."

SUCH a robust tone would be a major revolution in American Middle Eastern policy. It would replace weakness by firmness, and begin talking in the only language that overbearing dictatorships understand. Those who best comprehend the nature of the Arab—his respect for strength, especially when tempered by justice—believe the chances would be good for Egypt's acceptance of terms which treated her fairly but asked reasonable cooperation from her in return.

There is, however, a grave objection to this get-tough program: the obvious ability of the Soviet Union to help Nasser circumvent most of the sanctions. Conceivably, the Russians could prop up the Aswan works, buy up the cotton, break the general embargo—and keep pouring arms in at drastic markdowns. And in the UN, it is not certain that a Soviet veto could be frustrated or even that a majority would be willing to move against Egypt because of the Soviet arms sales. After all, the purchase of tanks and planes from the East *could* be regarded as a perfectly valid commercial transaction if one wished to put tongue in cheek, a habitual place for that organ with diplomats. Aggression is not aggression until committed, however loudly the intention to do so is proclaimed.

Nor can Britain be relied upon to undertake the risk involved in delaying her troop departure (now almost completed) from the Suez area. There is nothing in the Anglo-Egyptian Suez treaty which prevents Egypt from obtaining arms wherever she pleases. Of course, the spirit of a treaty designed to keep the bases intact for the British if the Russians invaded the Middle East would manifestly be violated if, in the interim,

Egypt allowed Soviet "experts" to take over her military establishment and those very Suez installations which she has pledged to maintain *against* the Soviets! After the Czech bombshell, this was pointed out to Nasser by the British embassy—but in a very small voice. Britain is not eager once again to be beleaguered inside a Suez cantonment by fanatic native masses. If Egypt permits the Soviets to infiltrate high and low, Britain may be goaded to tear up the Suez conventions—but by that time it will not matter, because the damage will have been done.

SOME observers are convinced there is a more potent remedy at hand for Egyptian stubbornness—much simpler and more effective than elaborate systems of sanctions, or even than the actual current hints of Anglo-American armed intervention. The remedy, they say, requires imagination on the part of the West, an intimate knowledge of Arab character—and courage. Hitherto these elements have not been conspicuously visible in Western policy. Acquired at this late date, they might nevertheless still accomplish wonders.

Until now, it is pointed out, Western diplomacy has never used the one fact in the Middle Eastern complex which gives the Arabs their greatest concern and serves as the sharpest brake on their pseudo-belligerency. That fact is the uncontested superiority of the Israeli army over any alliance of Arab

armies—and the deep, abiding Arab awareness of it. The safest defense the Arabs possess against Israel is the 1950 Anglo-Franco-American guarantee by which the West is more or less committed to intervene in case of an Arab-Israeli war. Suppose, it is daringly suggested, this guarantee were suddenly to be withdrawn. It is by no means too wild a conjecture that if this move came quickly—before the Egyptians learned to operate their new weapons—Arab arrogance would evaporate like magic. If not, it would remain for Israelis and Arabs to settle their differences in their own way and time, without external interference. The result, say those who know the assets of both sides, would not be in doubt.

But how could a diplomatic green light for an Arab-Israeli war possibly achieve peace? How could the dispute be kept local? What would, or could, the Soviets do? What are the risks and rewards of such an intrepid Western policy? And if the West balks at this policy, does Israel have any other way to utilize the psychological and physical advantage of her superior fighting skill and spirit? Can Israel devise and implement an *independent* policy in the cause of her own survival?

[This is the second of a series of articles by Mr. Lehrman based on his recent extensive tour of the Arab states and Israel. A third article will appear shortly.]